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Fear and Fantasy in a Global World

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

SUSANA ARAÚJO, MARTA PACHECO PINTO,
AND SANDRA BETTENCOURT

At a time when the mass media insists on bombarding us with news about natural, political and economic disasters, from flu pandemics to terrorist threats, thus acting as “weapons of massive communication”,¹ words, ideas and images associated with such “crises” and “catastrophes” shape to a great extent collective memory and current imagination. However, the way concepts such as “crisis” and “catastrophe” depend upon and depart from fear and fantasy still needs in-depth analysis and further discussion. *Fear and Fantasy in a Global World* seeks to stir the debate on the processes and meanings of, as well as on the relations between, fear and fantasy in the globalized world. Collective fears and fantasies will be analysed here from a number of cross-disciplinary perspectives. Such diversity is promoted by the epistemological underpinnings of comparative literature, particularly in terms of the wide range of textual corpora this field is able to embrace as well as in terms of the critical and theoretical paradigms it is capable of bringing together.

The volume explores the multiple ways in which culture, theory and the arts (literature and visual representations in particular) absorb, rework or challenge many of our collective fears, fantasies and anxieties in late global capitalism. In various ways and from different disciplinary angles, the essays respond to and scrutinize key questions related to the imaginaries of fear and fantasy, as well as their relations to trauma, crisis, anxiety, and representations of both the conscious and the unconscious. Despite their origins in psychoanalytic theory – namely in the work of Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein, Jacques Lacan, Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, among others – “fear” and

¹ Paul Virilio, *City of Panic*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005, 32.

"fantasy" have become pivotal terms in cultural and literary studies, and, as the essays show, they have recently seized the attention of theorists in a number of academic fields, such as literature, philosophy and politics.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud highlights the distinction between fear and anxiety through the *tertium comparationis* of danger.² While he believed anxiety to be a state of expectation and preparation for a danger or threat which could be unknown (that is, have no object or an object not yet grasped), fear implied more specific and determinate objects. Anxiety and fear therefore elicit defensive reactions. In this light, fantasy is also devised or brought forth as a defensive architecture that morphs yet is percolated by *Wirklichkeit* – reality perceived as surrounding and external, in contrast to *Realität*, the psychic principle. For Freud, fantasy (*Phantasie*) was mainly a defence mechanism, a construction that allows one to deal with reality. Phantasizing was thus thought of as a means to sidestep certain elements of reality somehow ancillary to the pleasure principle.

In turn, daydreaming was considered a resourceful mental elaboration stemming from the unconscious: "These day-dreams are cathected with a large amount of interest; they are carefully cherished by the subject and usually concealed with a great deal of sensitivity ... such phantasies may be unconscious just as well as conscious."³ For Freud these play a central role both in everyday life as well as in art:

The energetic and successful man is one who succeeds by his efforts in turning his wishful phantasies into reality. Where this fails, as a result of the resistances of the external world and of the subject's own weakness, he begins to turn away from reality and withdraws into his more satisfying world of phantasy, the content of which is transformed into symptoms should he fall ill. In certain favorable circumstances, it still remains possible for him to find another path leading from these phantasies to reality, instead of becoming permanently estranged from it by regressing to infancy. If a person who is at loggerheads with reality possesses an artistic gift (a thing that is still a psychological mystery to us), he can transform his

phantasies into artistic creations instead of into symptoms. In this matter, he can escape the doom of neurosis and by this roundabout path regain his contact with reality.⁴

Fantasy, it should be noted at this point, also became a central issue with the development of the Kleinian group within the British Psycho-Analytical Society. For Kleinian psychoanalysts the unconscious was made up of innate phantasies of relations with objects. Indeed, Melanie Klein has extended Freud's concept of fantasy to cover the developing child's relationship to a world of internal objects.⁵ For her, play inner activity is known as "unconscious fantasy". In Kleinian psychoanalysis, "phantasies" (spelled with "ph") correspond to the state of mind of an infant child during "pre-linguistic" stages of development, through which the baby tests the relation between internal and external world, imagination and reality. These differed from ordinary daydreams or "fantasies" (spelled with an "f" in Kleinian terminology), which would correspond to the normal reverie, daydream, an imagined construction for the fulfillment of our basic needs and wishes.

Lacan, however, relates fear to fantasy in the emergence of anxiety as inherent to the "mirror stage": the one who sees the horizontally inverted image on the mirror experiences the anxiety of loss. Indeed that imago is the phantasmatic appearance of the lost or fallen phallus.⁶ Such anxiety is enhanced by the motherly engulfment of the subject, primarily mediated by the objectal ambivalence of the breast, indicating the lack of separation of the mother in opposition to the danger of the Freudian separation from the mother. Thus, anxiety takes hold as an intrinsic loss with no full match or fulfilling object in the realm of *Wirklichkeit* or the reality perceived as external. Nevertheless, anxiety as determined by desire has indeed an object of a different kind, the *objet (petit) a* (the remainder of the division of the subject), the object-cause of desire: agent of the unpredictable and therefore of things both desirable and undesirable over which the subject will never gain full grasp or mastery, as they remain portended

² Sigmund Freud, *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, London: Penguin, 1995, 81.

³ Melanie Klein, *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945*, London: Karnac Books, 1975. See also Melanie Klein, *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963*, London: Vintage, 1997.

⁴ See especially Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan X. Anxiety: 1962-1963*, trans. Cormac Gallagher, London: Karnac Books, 2002.

² Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), trans. James Strachey, New York: W.W. Norton, 1961.

³ Sigmund Freud, *On Psychopathology*, ed. Angela Richards, London: Penguin, Penguin Freud Library Penguin, 1988, 88.

or at the very least adumbrated by A, *l'Autre*, the position of the Utterly Other. This desire towards the other, who is expected to reciprocate by making that object accessible again, is constructed through fantasy, since the object has never quite been there in the first place – it was revelled in as a fundamental misunderstanding, an effect of meaning (*effet de sens*). Fantasy is a symbolic rendition of the proportion (*rappport*) between the Imaginary and the Real that may allow the subject to repeat the traumatic encounter of loss (the not-being-there of the object) as something less unbearable and tied to *jouissance*. Such fundamental fantasy operates like a screen for the performance and agency (projection) of memory in the sense of “screen memory” as defined by Freud. Screen memory refers to unconscious reconstructions of infancy events that would mask and reconcile repressed experiences. As a surface for the deployment of desire, fantasy becomes a sort of play where the not-being-there of an object is not only experienced as belonging to the past but also being trapped in the future. It is also a symbolic compact with an ideally undivided Other (A) which is supposed to grant access to and satisfaction of that very lack the fantasy stands for.

The shocking encounter with the Real reveals the desert of such hopes of fulfillment leading to a state of anxiety that is experienced when that “lack is lacking”, when the desire (lack of the object) becomes consciously insatiable (lack of the lack). This may lead to a sense of great threat and to major defences such as phobias. Phobia appears as a lesser evil or a less unbearable way of witnessing lack as it replaces anxiety with fear. Both being of the symbolic order, fear and phobia may be further elaborated by means of a symbolic object which seems to be further concealed or gone for good in the case of anxiety.

Laplanche and Pontalis present an ontology of fantasy by reviewing Freud's formulations on trauma and fantasy. They reject the binarism between reality and illusion, and rather support the notion of a third category – Freud's “psychical reality” – in which fantasy is perceived as latent content of specific manifestations.⁷ In this way, the internal and external, subjective and objective, experiences become interdependent and reality is contained in the fantasy structure, evident in the Oedipus complex and primal fantasies, directly linked to the

drive. Desire is rooted in fantasy and the subject is always present in a subjectivized or desubjectivized status. Hence, fantasy is not only the setting of desire but of defensive reactions as well. Fantasy is, thus, a mixed entity – a “metapsychological” status – which precludes the division between conscious and unconscious fantasies about the impossible recovery of primal experiences and objects replaced with phantasmatical substitutes. It leads to the awareness of difference and the dramatized condition of perception, understood as an interplay between the presence and the absence of such signifiers. Fantasy, therefore, becomes the setting of unstable identity formations.

Some of the philosophical and political implications of the concept of fantasy and the way these have shaped contemporary academic thought can also be understood through the work of Slavoj Žižek. For the last four decades, Žižek has famously recovered the term “fantasy” to re-examine the effects of ideology in the Western psyche. For Žižek fantasy hides the shock of what Lacan called the Real, while it simultaneously attempts to create the replacement of what it conceals. Ideology, for Žižek, is not merely an illusion that masks the actual state of things, more significantly it is an unconscious fantasy that is produced so as to shape social reality. In fact, Žižek points out that “fantasy creates a great amount of ‘subject positions’, among which the free floating subject is able to move from one identification to the other”.⁸ This shows the complex nature of fantasy at work. Not only does fantasy recast desire through hallucinatory images but it also aims at redistributing subjective positions in terms of a foreign desire. Ideology is, thus, not merely powerful or dangerous because it lacks of Real. What is important is to understand why ideology gets in the way of the figurations of the Real. For Žižek it is fantasy which “teaches to us how to desire”,⁹ how to domesticate desire and define, all the while shaping, one's place in social reality. For literary and cultural studies, Žižek's overall work has been an enticing and challenging territory to explore many of the contradictions inherent to artistic and cultural representation in a world dominated by total capitalism and global market speculation.

Influenced by many of the above concepts and ideas, *Fear and Fantasy in a Global World* seeks to take that exploration further by examining the profound and wide-ranging impact of the workings of

⁷ See especially Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *Formations of Fantasy*, eds Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan, London: Methuen, 1986.

⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, London: Verso, 1997, 16.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

fantasy in a neoliberal context shaped by financial anxieties, economic insecurity and cultural fearfulness. The book also departs from the premise that our fears and fantasies are symptomatic or symptom-capable, and are thus subjectively productive, of change. While they may be interpreted as a way to escape or replace reality, they also lead us to question, rewrite and act upon reality.

The essays gathered in this volume attempt to interrogate the causes of collective fantasies and what their impact is, or might be, as they are translated into social dialects and protocols. Some of them explore current manifestations of fantasy and creativity in contemporary philosophical, political and cultural landscapes, while others examine how literature and culture have engaged with or reacted to the pressures of globalization in reproducing fears and fantasies. Some essays also analyse how modern media and other means of intercultural and intermedial communication changed the way fears and fantasies are constructed and disseminated.

This collection includes articles by well-established and reputed literary studies scholars, whilst also embracing selected essays by promising young scholars in contemporary literature from internationally recognized academic institutions. The seventeen articles are thematically grouped into four dialoguing parts which take up the topics above and illustrate the wide range of disciplines dealt with from a comparative perspective, such as literary studies, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, film studies, economics, politics, and philosophy.

Part 1, "Local Fears, Global Anxieties", looks at how globalization has not only changed the way of perceiving and consuming objects, but also reshaped or dissolved the boundaries between the public and the private.

The author and psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas opens the book with a provocative stance on the notions of communication, media and transmission. In "The Transmissive Self and Transmissive Objects in the Age of Globalization", Bollas focuses on social media to reflect about "transmissive spaces" and their "transmissive objects", which enable real-time virtual communication. According to Bollas, transmissive communication molds the way information flows as well as individuals' interaction and identities, both virtual and transmissive,

thus shaping contemporary responses to global anxieties, all the while blurring the borders between fantasy and reality.

James Rushing Daniel in "Dreamlandic Fantasy: Consumerism and Control in Bragi Ólafsson's *The Pets*" offers an analysis of Ólafsson's novel *The Pets* (2001) as an insight into the collapse of Iceland's economy following the 2008 global financial crisis. Daniel interweaves Icelandic reality with the narrative of the novel, problematizing the effects of consumerism, marketing agency and financial speculation, at the same time posing fantasy as a possibility of dealing with financial and social crises.

David Vichnar examines two Latin American novels, Ignacio de Loyola Brandão's *Zero* (1979) and Roberto Bolaño's *2666* (2004), in "'Territories of Risk' within 'Topological Space': From *Zero* to *2666*, and Back". Vichnar argues through these case studies that committed literature reaffirms itself as a "territory of risk", the medium through which violence, real fear and fantasy can be better represented and questioned, not only aesthetically but also ethically.

Edith Beltrán explores a different kind of engaged literature in "Mexico's Fearscape: Where Fantasy Personas Engage in Citizenship" by offering the "fearscape" as the space/escape of a "culture of fear" in virtual worlds such as blogs. Beltrán analyses the enactment of virtual identities and the construction of fantasy personae in such "fearscapes", where individuals feel secure from violence. By shuffling private and public spheres, fearscapes become the only possibility of political and social performance and engagement in Mexico's drug wars and narco-discourse.

Part 2, "The Limits of Knowledge: Fantasy and Identity Formation", challenges the power of imagination and fantasy by focusing on different representations of fear and threats.

In "The Site of Initiative: Towards a Hermeneutic Framework for Analysing the Imagination of Future Threats", Martijn Boven revisits the later works of Paul Ricœur to elaborate on the importance of the "site of initiative" as the place of action and transformation in society. This site of agency is determined, though, by the tension between two orders of imagination: experience (productive imagination) and expectation (reproductive imagination). The dynamics of both orders inform constructions of unknown worlds, and thus unknown threats, that is, utopias and dystopias. Ultimately, for Boven, this positive

space resulting from the tension between both orders is threatened by current anxieties and fears of an imagined future.

Christin Grunert, in "Conflict with the Perception of Time as Fertile Ground for Collective Insecurity: The Frightening Reality of Scientific Facts and their Transformation in Literary Fiction", discusses nineteenth-century literary representations of scientific discoveries, archaeology and geology in particular, and how they lead to exciting but fearful fantasies of past and future societies. Such discoveries contributed to a *fin-de-siècle* insecurity fuelled by the dissemination of archaeological and geological findings as portrayed in English and German dystopian narratives.

Travelling forward to the twentieth century, Gero Gutzzeit explores in "Fearful Fantasy: Figurations of the Oedipus Myth in Scorsese's *Shutter Island* (2010)" the genre of detective fiction. He departs from Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, which is considered the first of its genre, to draw a parallel with cinematic narratives, namely Scorsese's *Shutter Island* (2010). Gutzzeit examines the development of anxiety into fear and the ways of restraining it. Through his case study he reflects upon the representation of the Oedipus myth as a journey from ignorance to knowledge, as embodied in the fantasy of a detective character.

Marija Struk, in "Laugh Away the Fear! The Satisfaction of Comical Fantasy in the Holocaust Film Comedies of the Late 1990s", undertakes an inverse movement from knowledge to enacted ignorance. Such a movement is discussed in relation to the cinematic representation of secondary and/or collective trauma in three films that deal with the horror of the Holocaust: *La vita è bella* (1997), *Train de vie* (1998), and *Jakob the Liar* (1999). Struk grounds her analysis on three concepts, "fear", "fantasy" and "comedy", which she relates to psychoanalytical theory from Freud and Lacan, in order to question the ethics of comic representation and appropriation of past historical events.

Alexandra Hills, in "Viennese Fantasies, Austrian Histories: Space, Fantasy and Fascism in Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina* and Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter*", reflects on urban and psychological representations in the literary work of Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina* (1971) and Liliana Cavani's film *The Night Porter* (1974). The question of trauma and Holocaust remains a focus of analysis while the author examines private and public identities and sexual/gender

issues, as well as the role played by fear and fantasy in the (re)interpretation and (re)presentation of the fearful past.

Part 3, "Boundaries and Performance: Language, Memory and Fantasy", deals more closely with language performance, national identity, different kinds of pleasure seeking, and memory-related issues.

Harriet Hulme, in "A Politics of Form: Fantasy and Storytelling as Modes of Resistance in the Work of Atxaga and Kundera", explores language as a form of belonging. Hulme interrogates the way minor languages make use of magical realism not only as a form of escapism from fearful and authoritarian societies but also as performance of political statements. Hulme analyses the novels *Obabakoak* (1988), by Bernardo Atxaga, and *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1970), by Milan Kundera, to discuss the interplay between linguistic, literary and political fantasies and how counter-discourses can emerge from such interplay and contribute to the making of a nation.

Ana Filipa Prata, in "Memory and Fantasy in Antoine Volodine's *Minor Angels*", offers an analysis of Volodine's *Minor Angels* (1999) from a "post-exotic" perspective, as developed by Volodine himself. "Post-exoticism" mainly deals with dystopias: worlds destroyed by catastrophes, a "post-crisis" reality where language has lost its referent. In the author's work, Prata argues, reality and fiction, memory and discourse become undistinguishable, a new fantasy of the self and the world that helps dealing with individual and collective traumas and renewed fears.

In contrast with *Minor Angels*, which Prata discusses as a recollection of events that the novel's protagonist feels as punishment, Hande Gurses picks up a novel where recollecting becomes a reward. In "The Fantasy of the Archive: An Analysis of Orhan Pamuk's *The Museum of Innocence*", she analyses Pamuk's novel *The Museum of Innocence* (2008/2009) by examining the process of transformation of a subject into an object of fantasy as a result of a profound fear of loss. Gurses discusses the love story of the protagonist of the narrative, its public legitimization and imperial reverberations through the fantasy of the archive as the desire to command and control based on the theoretical works of Derrida and Lacan. Discussion builds on the boundaries between public and private, agency and passive experience, archive and museum.

From literary to digital representations, in "The Digital Meta-Dissemination of Fear in Music Videos. A Transdisciplinary Textual Analysis of Two Case Studies: Esben and the Witch's *Marching Song* and M.I.A.'s *Born Free*", João Pedro da Costa adopts a transdisciplinary approach to textually analyse two music videos concerning the treatment of fear in the fantastic landscape of digital, musical and visual spheres. Such an approach crosses the borders between public and private realities and, consequently, the transfer of the fearful experience from the fictional to the real world.

Part 4, "Uncanny Representations of the Self and the Other", looks into the relationship between self-representation and otherness, and the associated fears and fantasies, as depicted and explored across different media.

In "Shaft which Ran: Chinese Whispers with Auerbach, Buck, Woolf and De Quincey", Ortwin de Graef questions Auerbach's tragic realism by re-reading Pearl Buck, Virginia Woolf and Thomas De Quincey and their representations of the fetishism of a sinophobia as aestheticization and fantasy of human sympathy.

Brecht de Groote in "The Phantom in the Mirror: Duplication, Spectrality, and the Romantic Fear of Fantasy in Wordsworth, Coleridge and De Quincey" investigates the interconnections between fantasy, spectralization and fear in Romantic imagery. In order to develop such an examination of the shift from duplication to spectrality, de Groote analyses the aesthetics of De Quincey and Coleridge's poetry in terms of their lyrical representations of fear and idealism.

Other lyrical representations of fear and fantasy are discussed by Margarita García Candeira as regards the poetics of the Spanish poet Luis García Montero in "Habitability and Spectres in the House of Language: Approaching (Post)Modernity in *Las flores del frío*", by Luis García Montero. Focusing on the uncanny, the spectral and the phantasmagorical, Candeira questions the possibility of understanding post-modern poetical practices as a return to Modernity and its horrors (such as the Holocaust). Representation through poetic language is thus posed as a problem originating in the modern estrangement of language. Those concepts that linger in contemporary lyrical compositions also evoke Romantic and Enlightenment aesthetics, which shed light on the reading of Montero's poetry.

Daniela Di Pasquale takes a journey into the medieval representations of the Muslim in Dante's *Divine Comedy* in "War on Fear: Rinterpreting Dante's View of the 'Infidel'". Di Pasquale argues that the approach of the Italian poet to the "infidel", the "other", is a positive fantasy, understood as an identity-construction process, against (re)current fantasies of terror and fear in many Western literary depictions of the Oriental otherness, mainly during the Crusades.